

## Poetry Series

# Catherine Rankovic

- poems -

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## **Blue Chicory**

It has made its way, on wind,  
far into the city, and it nods there,  
on streetcorners, in what July wind  
its slips garner. Since childhood  
I have loved it, it is so violet-blue,  
its root, its marrow, so interred,  
prepared to suffer, impossible to move.  
Weed, wildflower, grown waist-high  
where it is no one's responsibility  
to mow, its blue-white  
center frankly open  
as an eye, it flaunts  
its tender, living lingerie,  
the purple hairs of its interior.  
Women are weeds and weeds are women,  
I once heard a woman say.  
Bloom where you are planted, said my mother.

Catherine Rankovic

## Born on January 23

Indispensible only as  
masters of circumstance: Humphrey Bogart,  
Django Reinhardt, Ernie Kovacs,  
Princess Caroline of Monaco. All  
on the strangest trips and trajectories, all short-lived  
or long beset. All great in their recorded moments, all  
good at choosing spouses; all with the oddest smiles:  
Bogart's humble smile hid his partial plate;  
Kovacs smoking a cigar underwater,  
grinning, was almost handsome for a second;  
Caroline, a licorice brunette, her children's father  
killed at thirty, expertly  
delivers a smile like Grace's.  
And Chita Rivera too shares my birthday,  
not the star but the spitfire, the comic relief; and Jeanne Moreau,  
more actress than beauty; and a Nobel-winning physicist  
and professor of chemiluminescence.  
They sidle through their days,  
silver-medalists, even Stendahl,  
whose *The Red and the Black* I read in translation,  
trying to magnify and tell my fortune  
through the birthdays of the well-known.  
I don't smile (although my teeth are superb) .  
I love cameras and recording equipment, I love the ghosts  
that haunt films and disks, I love the glitter  
Caroline leaves when she disappears  
into the Pyrenees with passels of children,  
making a triumph of a crippling event  
as did Django Reinhardt.  
Oh, and then there's John Hancock,  
who I guess did only that one famous thing,  
and Edouard Manet  
whose paintings are one vowel away  
from being greater art.

Catherine Rankovic

## **Film at Eleven**

Lord, bless those  
whose crosses carry them  
like picket signs before us, saying: This is What Happens;  
Worth a thousand commandments  
are one illustration, one obituary, one  
sentence handed down,  
one vacant body, packed into an ambulance or tomb,  
dismissed, having done. We stand  
around their sudden fame,  
absorbing the lesson: Those who look  
for trouble will find it; those who don't are simply taken  
and shaken void of spirit -Lord, mercy on them,  
unfortunates who had it coming, like a gift;  
who made bad ends, wrong decisions, and forgive us,  
we who otherwise are hard to entertain.

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## Self-Portrait with Dead Goldfinch

The little yellow finch,  
beautiful as a lemon, with a tailored  
black cap and epaulettes,  
we fed from our feeder thistle seed  
moldy or contaminated, and all night  
on the stoop, nearer to the house  
than he had ever been, he hopped  
helpless to fly, pecked  
at the screen-door's aluminum kickplate, threw himself  
against it again and again.  
My husband who was awake at midnight  
heard its petition, saw it by flashlight,  
knew it was dying, knew I would cry for it, let me sleep  
and before I woke  
cupped its marshmallow body in his hands  
and buried it far in the tall grass.  
Then he told me. Odd  
the wild bird had wanted shelter to die in;  
odd that it knew that if I had heard it  
I would have taken it in  
hoping it would live, my compassion immense  
for creatures so small; and for my husband,  
recriminations and contempt, and for a fellow  
frowning into a camera  
from overseas, nothing; neglect;  
he just a candy wrapper of a man.

One never comes close to wild birds;  
too close and they fly  
like drops of oil from a hot pan.  
They barely come close to themselves, they touch  
what they touch so lightly.  
I wish they would eat from my hand.  
I intend no harm, I want only to  
admire them, their markings,  
their caps and wing linings, their wise eyes.  
Oh, all I want is to look and marvel,  
but when I approach they see  
the shadow of their deaths, and suddenly  
occupy the sky, which is like an open mind.

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